

Social Gospel

2 Tim 1:13

1

13 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

If an impartial outside observer were to look at the different religions that are in the world today, what differences would they see? What are the practices, what are the things that distinguish each group from the others? Which groups observe the Lord's Supper, which take it weekly? Which groups practice baptism as necessary to salvation? Which groups think that baptism is nothing more than just an outward sign of a salvation already realized? Which think that grace only saves or that once saved, always saved? Which groups think that God is still sending His Holy Spirit to come upon people and give them the power to perform miracles? This list could go on almost ad finitum. The point is that in years past the observable differences were both obvious and apparent. But what is being seen now is that the lines of difference are quickly and unfortunately being blurred. Where once the differences stood out like a sore thumb, the practices of the world of religion are starting to become more and more common, even among those congregations that call themselves, Church of Christ.

Paul, in this passage from Timothy, establishes a principle that says there is a standard, a measurement of sound words that the followers of Christ are to adhere to in faith and love in Christ. It is this pattern of sound words that should dictate the differences seen in the different religions out there. The real impact of this, is that if an observer can't tell the difference anymore, what separates the Lord's Church from anything else, including the designs of man?

The truth of the matter is to be found in Paul's statement to Timothy, God's Church, the kingdom established by Jesus Christ, the keys of which are found in the Gospel. God's Church is distinguished from any and all other religions by the things that it practices and teaches. There is no such thing as accidental righteousness. Righteousness comes from only one source, that is God's truth. The Hebrew writer calls it...

Heb 5:12-13

2

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. **13** For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

Paul says it this way in...

Phil 3:8-9

3

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, **9** and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of

my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

Then in..

1 Thess 5:21-22 **4**

21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; **22** abstain from every form of evil.

Here Paul says much the same thing as he said to Timothy, only in a slightly different way.

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|----------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 5 | 1) Examine everything | Standard of sound words |
| 6 | 2) Hold fast to what is good | Retain |
| 7 | 3) Faith and Love in Christ | Abstain from Evil |

The idea to abstain or avoid the appearance of evil then begs the question...

8 ***What is the Evil we are to avoid?***

As we have seen, there is no such thing as accidental righteousness. The only source of righteousness is God through Christ and has been revealed to man through the Holy Scriptures. The next verse in the passage we looked at in Hebrews bears this out...

Heb 5:14 **9**

14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

The solid food under discussion here is the truth of God's word and when someone learns it, believes it, and practices it they learn how to discern good from evil, the thought being that all which is from God is good or righteous, but anything and everything, else is evil. So the answer to the question then, is that...

10 ***Anything that does not come from God is EVIL***

Hopefully we have established that point well enough to begin to draw some conclusions based on what is observed in other religious practices. I have an article written by Rodney Pitts, a Christian who made the decision to walk away from a group that called themselves a Church of Christ that was becoming deeply involved in what is known today as...

11*The Social Gospel*

This concept of Social Gospel is the practice of incorporating as a work of the Church what can be defined as nothing other than social activities. More often than not these activities are recreational in nature, though not always. They can take the form of potlucks in the building, having a basketball gym, sponsoring outings for the young people, sponsoring programs for the needy, addicted, or recovering, all with funds from the Lord's treasury. Now please, PLEASE, do not misunderstand what is being said. Inherently, there is not necessarily anything wrong or sinful with these, but just like there is nothing inherently wrong with taking care of orphans, and if an individual chooses to send money to an organization to help with the orphans of the world, they should do so without fear that it is a sin, it isn't. But there is absolutely no authorization for the Church to send the Lord's money to any other organization to take of the work it should be doing in and among itself. The issue isn't the orphans; it is how the authority that God has given is applied.

Brethren, that is the same dynamic involved in so many of these Social Gospel functions. The primary authorization that is used to justify these things is the example and commandment we see in the scriptures of fellowship. Are you familiar with the concept of reverse engineering? This is when a finished product is taken apart to see how was built and then the component parts can be made to make more product. This is how much of the early technological advances made in the U.S. were copied by other nations in order to compete. Think about the path followed to justify these practices. We are to have fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ, so anything in which we can have fellowship is, by necessary inference, authorized as a work of the Church. Do you see the danger here? By using this line of thinking, a basketball gym can be authorized as a godly use of the Lord's money. But if that is true, then why not a skiing or fishing boat, a shooting gallery, a golf course, where does the line get drawn? After all, God doesn't say we can't.

In...

Acts 2:42

12

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

According to Strong's concordance there are 12 passages that use the term fellowship. Some of those are speaking of the fellowship we have with God and Christ...

1 John 1:6

13

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

Or...

1 Cor 1:9

14

9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

And...

2 Cor 13:14

15

14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

We are to be in fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This fellowship comes from being of the same mind as they are, looking towards their truth and righteousness to make them our own. John says that when we abide in God, He abides in us, when we walk in the truth, we fellowship with God and Christ. And by extension, when we walk in the truth, we fellowship with all others who walk in the truth...

1 John 1:7

16

7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Scriptural fellowship is the fellowship that comes from being one through the word, through Christ, in God, and that is what is seen in Paul's comment in...

Philem 4-6

17

4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, **5** because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; **6** and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.

So, to try and justify the things of the world by saying they are authorized by the idea of scriptural fellowship ignores the fact that scriptural fellowship is seen in our unity with each other in God.

Last Sunday after services, we were talking about this idea of Social Gospel and it was expressed that on one occasion when a ride was being given to a woman that an offer was made to take a friend of hers if they would like to attend services. The woman looked at her friend and said, come to Church with me, they have great food.

That comment speaks to the core of this discussion. What is the attraction? What is the reason that brings people here? You see, the thought process says...

18

Let's just get them here, then we can teach them the truth

Do you see the error in that? Again, this is the idea of the ends justifying the means. Using anything to try and get people into the building and then we'll teach the truth. There is no scenario where that is ever right.

Fellowship, as discussed and illustrated in the scriptures in the local Church is always in a spiritual context. It is never used to refer to anything recreational or social gathering. In fact, in 1

Cor. chapter 11 we read where the Church there had perverted the Lord's Supper into a common meal. They would gather together and in the name of the Lord's Supper eat a common meal. To compound the error, they would then not share with those who didn't have enough...

1 Cor 11:18-22 **19**

18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. **19** For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. **20** Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's supper, **21** for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. **22** What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?

The point here isn't that we should not ever take a meal together, his point is that taking a meal together is not the purpose of assembly nor is it a work of the Church. It is a social function that is the work of the individual. We must be careful not to confuse what an individual can do with what the Church can do. While the Church may be restricted in its functions, the individual has much more leeway.

The problem with Social Gospel is two-fold...

- 20**
- A) It is not a work of the Church to play social director or to fund social events
 - B) The danger of why people respond

This is the crux of the problem with Social religion. Why are people coming? Is it the food, or games or the social things, or is it the Word that draws them? If it's not the word...

John 6:26-27 **21**

26 Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. **27** Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."

Jesus tells the crowd that they were not coming to Him for the bread of life, but were seeking to be fed. There is so much going on in the world of religion today that is being done in the name of the Lord that has no foundation in the authority of the scriptures that the Church needs to be extremely careful in the things we do and practice so that we don't appear to be doing things not authorized by God in His word.

1 Thess 5:21-22 **22**

21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; **22** abstain from every form of evil.